

Exhibit 53



Permanent Observer Mission of The State of Palestine to the United Nations New York

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 23 APRIL 2020 BY PALESTINE AT THE UN

Mr. President,

We congratulate the Dominican Republic on its leadership of the Security Council in these turbulent days. We also commend China for its stewardship of the Council in March.

We thank UN Special Coordinator Nikolay Mladenov for his briefing and for his efforts and those of Humanitarian Coordinator Jamie McGoldrick and their team in Palestine at this critical time, including in support of our collective efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

On behalf of the Palestinian Government and people, I convey our deepest condolences to all bereaved families and countries on the tragic loss of life caused by this virus, and reaffirm our solidarity with all afflicted, wishing the restoration of health and stability to all.

We recognize the leadership of UN Secretary-General António Guterres and Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed in response to the pandemic. We commend their efforts to mobilize the UN system, with WHO in the lead to address the health impact of the pandemic, along with all relevant UN agencies that are helping alleviate the pandemic's vast economic, social, humanitarian and security impacts, including on women, children and youth, refugees and displaced persons.

This includes the valiant efforts of UNRWA in support of the Palestine refugees, alongside the other UN agencies and humanitarian organizations assisting the Palestinian people, helping protect them from the ravages of the pandemic, while alleviating the needs and hardships caused by Israel's illegal occupation and the historic injustice they have been forced to endure for so long. We appeal for urgent international support to UNRWA to ensure continuity of its essential work.

Today, we also underscore the Secretary-General's wise call for a global ceasefire, which President Mahmoud Abbas has endorsed on behalf of the State of Palestine. This must include a call on Israel, the occupying Power, to

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Today, we also underscore the Secretary-General's wise call for a global ceasefire, which President Mahmoud Abbas has endorsed on behalf of the State of Palestine. This must include a call on Israel, the occupying Power, to cease its war against the Palestinian people; stop its denial of their right to self-determination; stop its colonization and *de facto* annexation of Palestinian land; end its immoral blockade on the Gaza Strip; and release the thousands of Palestinians, including children, that it has imprisoned, who are at great risk of contagion in crowded, unsanitary prisons.

Israel must be unequivocally called upon to respect its legal obligations under the 4th Geneva Convention, and accountability for violations is imperative. Only in this way can human lives be saved and can the potential for peace and justice ever be realized.

We recognize that so many are now suffering and that fears about our individual and collective futures are at an all-time high. The Palestinian situation in this pandemic is, however, unique and painfully acute. Our coping capacities have been depleted by 53 years of this illegal occupation and its constant dispossession, deprivation and oppression of our people. This crisis will only exacerbate an already volatile situation.

Thus, the state of emergency declared on 5 March remains in place with a view to stopping the virus' spread, which would be disastrous, especially in Gaza where the health system is near collapse and an outbreak would gravely endanger lives, especially in the refugee camps. Despite limited resources and the severe restrictions imposed by the occupation, our Ministries and relevant national institutions are exerting all efforts to protect our population and respond to the vast humanitarian and socio-economic repercussions of this crisis and are doing so with the support of UN agencies and generous assistance of countries the world over, for which we are grateful.

Regrettably, however, even the extreme challenges posed by this pandemic to all have not convinced the occupying Power to stop its crimes. Instead, Israel carries on with its illegal policies and practices, business as usual. Whatever technical coordination has been achieved between the two sides in recent weeks to combat COVID-19 has been undercut by incessant violations. This is not politicization of the matter, as alleged by the Israeli representative; these are the hard facts.

Most flagrant of these violations has been Israel's annexation push. Officials and extremists openly vow to annex parts or all of the West Bank and brag about plans to commit this crime and to do so in full coordination with the current US administration. Shockingly, annexation became the centerpiece of the recent negotiations to form the new Israeli government.

While world leaders have been calling for negotiations to resolve all final status issues to end the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 and achieve a just and lasting peace, we are certain they did not mean negotiations between Netanyahu and Gantz to determine what Palestinian land they would steal and illegally annex.

Yet, as revealed by the cynical agreement reached in these past days, the Israeli government is forging ahead, in breach of the Charter and all other relevant provisions of international law, in blatant contempt of the Security Council, and undeterred by the international community, believing only the support of its main patron State matters.

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This should leave no doubt as to the extent that Israeli impunity has been emboldened by the US plan unveiled on 28 January and its dismissal of the internationally-endorsed terms of reference and parameters of a just solution based on international law, UN resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative and the framework of two States on the pre-1967 borders.

We reiterate: the US plan will not bring peace. This plan – and Israel's decision to proceed with annexation – will destroy the two-State solution and entrench Israel's military control over the Palestinian people and land.

As stressed in the Secretary-General's last report on resolution 2334 (2016), *"Unilateral steps are detrimental to peace... Israeli officials have repeatedly stated their intention to annex Israeli settlements and other parts of the occupied West Bank. If implemented, such steps would not only constitute a serious violation of international law, but they would also effectively end the prospect of the two-State solution and close the door to negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians"*. The result, we all know, will be a one-State reality of apartheid, guaranteeing more conflict, harming generations more of Palestinians and Israelis and the entire region.

Such an outcome must be averted at all costs. The international community must repudiate and demand a halt to all annexation measures. Do not fall prey to the pretexts crafted by Israeli officials – now the excuse of the pandemic – to divert attention from these crimes. Do not be fooled by the naming of the new government as a "national emergency government". Congratulatory words that ignore that annexation is central to this government's program effectively bless such crimes.

In this regard, we recognize the many strong statements issued – by Arab, European, African, Asian and Latin American States and organizations, as well as by Special Envoys of concerned States and by the UN – opposing Israeli annexation plans and demanding a halt. But, the years have proven that statements alone will not compel Israel's respect for the law, nor avert its looming destruction of the two-State solution as annexation is unfolding on the ground as we speak.

We urge the international community to act immediately, enforcing concrete and practical measures to hold Israel accountable for its perverse impunity. There must be consequences. There must be deterrent action. Only such action – by this Council, by the General Assembly, by the Quartet, in international judicial bodies, by parliaments and governments and by civil society – can ensure accountability towards halting violations and salvaging the prospects for a just peace and security based on the global consensus.

Without a halt to these violations, no efforts to create a credible political horizon towards attainment of a just, lasting and comprehensive solution will ever succeed.

The real concerns and worries raised worldwide by this horrible pandemic cannot be used as an excuse to ignore human rights violations and look the other way, as Israel would wish everyone do. On the contrary, this pandemic has only further highlighted the absurdity, immorality and illegality of such crimes and the urgency of bringing them to an end, right now.

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When people everywhere are being instructed to shelter at home, how can Israel, justify destroying homes? When people everywhere are desperately seeking medical care, how can Israel justify destruction of clinics and humanitarian assistance and medical neglect of prisoners? When the Secretary-General, joined by Pope Francis and leaders around the world, appeals for a global ceasefire, how can Israel justify its entrenchment of occupation and pursuit of annexation?

Now is the time to cease those violations and reverse the negative trends on the ground, not escalate them in such a flagrant, provocative way. Now is the time to heed the global calls for respect of international law, including the 4th Geneva Convention, and the relevant UN resolutions.

Now is the time to become more humane, more giving, not more brutal and more insatiable, imposing apartheid and never-ending conflict.

Now is the time to see the other as equal, as deserving of freedom and safety and security and prosperity as yourselves.

Now is the time to recognize our common humanity and shared future, to revive hope and trust. Now is the time to recognize that no injustice will last forever.

Israel has a choice. It may feel emboldened to blindly and arrogantly move ahead with annexation. But, should it choose to go down this illegal, destructive path, then it should not be surprised at the chain of events that will unfold. Many countries have already forewarned that annexation will not go unchallenged and that there will be consequences.

Those who are principled, who respect international law and the authority of the Security Council and General Assembly as pillars of the rules-based international order, will not stand idly by while the law and human rights of an entire people are so flagrantly breached and while the foundations for a just peace are destroyed, setting dangerous global precedents.

And, the Palestinian people will never forgo their inalienable human rights, including to self-determination and independence and to exist as a free and equal people, living in dignity, security and prosperity in their homeland. Even if the two-State solution is destroyed, it will not end their quest for freedom and justice. The Palestinian people and leadership remain resilient.

We must join together to uphold international law and insist on its respect without exceptions. It is time for an international peace conference to finally resolve the Palestine question and end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is time to bring this illegal occupation to an end. It is time for justice and for the Palestinian people to know freedom and dignity in their independent, sovereign State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, to live side by side in peace and security with all of their neighbors, joining together to meet all the challenges before us and create a better, brighter future for all of our peoples.

I thank you, Mr. President.



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